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Talking Points for the DCI
(3 November 1983)

Prospects for Lebanon

At the national reconciliation conference, the Lebanese Christian community is looking for ways to avoid making significant concessions to the Muslim and Druze majority. The Gemayel government and Christian hardliners would prefer to see the United States and/or Israel engage the Syrians militarily and thus reduce the bargaining power of Damascus's Lebanese allies and surrogates. Failing that, however, Gemayel apparently is prepared to suspend the Lebanese-Israeli withdrawal agreement in return for Syrian and Muslim willingness to reduce their demands for political reforms.

- For the last two days, the conferees have tried to develop a formula for dealing with the withdrawal agreement that will be acceptable to both Syria and the Gemayel government. Lebanon's internal problems have yet to be discussed.

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Syria has already privately agreed to compromise language concerning the agreement. The compromise language calls for the Lebanese Government to review the withdrawal accord, taking into consideration several principles, including previous agreements Lebanon has made with the Arab world.

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If agreement is reached on the Lebanese-Israeli withdrawal accords, Gemayel is likely to urge the participants to form a government of national unity.

- The opposition is unlikely to participate unless they have assurances--preferably from the United States--that Gemayel is sincere about proceeding with constitutional changes.

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A government of national unity, however, will still have to resolve Lebanon's factional problems. An uneasy stalemate may endure for some time, but eventually confessional tensions will result in a new round of clashes.

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- The various factional leaders, in fact, may agree to join a government of national unity only to buy time until the winter is over and they can once again pursue their military options. [redacted]

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Whatever the outcome of the national reconciliation conference, radical Shias, who were responsible for the bombing at the MNF compounds, are likely to continue their campaign of violence in Lebanon. These radical Shia groups, backed by Iran, are not interested in political compromises and want Lebanon transformed into a fundamentalist, Islamic state. They will pose a threat to any Lebanese government.

- Their ability to carry out successful terrorist attacks also serves to undermine moderate Shia leader Nabih Barri. [redacted]

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Syrian Role

The Syrians responded to greater US involvement in Lebanon with a shift from the military to the diplomatic option.

- For the time being, Damascus appears optimistic that its allies and surrogates can keep political pressure on Gemayel to make concessions to Syrian and Lebanese Muslim interests.
- Syrian Foreign Minister Khaddam has been a forceful participant at the conference and he apparently hopes to engineer the creation of a government of national unity that will request the withdrawal of MNF and Israeli forces. [redacted]

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Syria retains the capability, however, to disrupt a resolution of the crisis that does not meet its demands.

- Should the talks fail, the Syrians could try to renew pressure on Gemayel in ways that make a US response more difficult, such as stirring up street fighting in Beirut or initiating a major terrorist campaign against the government and the Phalange Party. [redacted]

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